

Drugs 71

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Asians Doubt That U.S. Can Halt Heroin Flow

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BANGKOK, Thailand, Aug. 10 —Formidable obstacles confront the United States in its efforts to halt the flow of heroin to its troops in Vietnam and to prevent Southeast Asian heroin from moving into the American market to fill the gap that may be left if the traffic from the Middle East is contained.

American officials, aware of the high priority President Nixon attaches to the program, display determined hopefulness that the flow can be significantly reduced, at least while American troops remain in south Vietnam.

Asian officials, on the other hand, are openly doubtful of the chances of even limited success over a short term. They express growing concern that a problem that they had considered primarily American may also be on the rise among their own people. They see the search for a solution—if indeed

one can be found—as a process that will take years.

The Asians agree with American officials that with increased United States assistance they can intercept a greater share of the traffic in opium and its derivatives from the contiguous growing areas in the mountains of northeastern Burma, northern Thailand and northwestern Laos. But they believe that both supply and demand are so great and the profits so temptingly high that the supply and the demand will remain more or less in balance until one or the other can be controlled.

In a month of inquiry in Thailand and Laos it was possible to get a reasonably full picture of how the sap of the seeded pod of *Papaver somniferum*, the opium poppy, moves from the mountain tribesmen who cultivate and harvest it, is converted into heroin and

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tioned in Vietnam and to their supply flights, but no evidence was offered. Vietnamese military flights from Cambodia are also suspect.

While the American officials are reluctant to provide details, they affirm that increasing amounts of heroin seized in the United States are traceable to Southeast Asia. Hong Kong was also cited often as a source of heroin—refined there from opium or morphine base produced in the Thai-Laotian-Burmese region—in both Vietnam and the United States.

Most of the chemists working for high wages at refineries in Burma, Laos and perhaps Thailand are thought to have received their training in Hong Kong or Macao.

Transit and Processing Centers

Most experts agree that neither Laos nor Thailand provides much home-grown opium or derivatives for the world market. Their importance is believed to be largely as transit and processing areas for Burmese opium.

Current estimates are that about a thousand tons of raw opium a year are produced in the border region. Only about 30 tons originate in Laos, where most of the poppygrowing regions have fallen to the Communists, and 200 tons in Thailand.

Under heavy American pressure Thailand and Laos have begun considering programs to cut the flow of opium, although officials of both countries emphasize that they consider their efforts more as assistance to their strong ally than actions in their national interest.

Because of the strong American hold in Laos, the comparative scarcity of transport and the country's landlocked character, the United States is given a better chance there than in Thailand of restricting the flow.

Military's Role Said to End

The Acting Defense Minister of Laos, Sisouk na Champasak, said in an interview that the recent retirement from active service of General Ouane had removed the military from the opium traffic. Mr. Sisouk said he had confronted the general with the accusation that he was "the real boss" and he admitted it. According to the Minister, the commander in chief said:

"It's been going on for a long time. Why stop now? If we take it over, why let the Chinese have it? I am not stealing the state's money."

The American experts said

miss no opportunity to remind the Laotian military to get the army out of the opium trade.

The American officials in Laos are pressing strongly for a law to forbid opium production and trafficking that was proposed to the National Assembly by the Premier, Prince Souvanna Phouma, at American urging. The Assembly has been slow in taking action.

One of its members, recently appointed Ambassador to a European country, had to be recalled for "consultation" before he presented his credentials. On his arrival at his post his baggage was found to contain 60 kilograms of white heroin.

U.S. Pressure Resented

Many Laotian officials are growing resentful at American pressure because, they allege, the United States has long known of the implication of the Laotian armed forces but, for its own reasons, has tolerated the practice.

"When military goals were most important to the Americans, they were ready to overlook anything," said Maj. Gen. Kouprasith Abbay, newly appointed deputy commander in chief. "Now, domestic political interests are dominant, and suddenly the Americans want us to act."

Thailand, in the view of high officials in Washington, has been slow in taking effective action. In an interview, Maj. Gen. Nitya Bhanumas, head of the Central Bureau of Narcotics of the police, stressed that to comply fully with American requests for greatly increased law enforcement, the United States would have to supply greater support to his forces.

Asked about enforcement results so far, he showed photographs of opium seizures several years back and of the executions of four Chinese traffickers, also some years old.

One of the more original plans pursued by Thailand led a ranking police official recently to confer in Burma with leaders of the Chinese force there to inquire how much they would charge to refrain from the opium trade. The official, in an interview, said the talks were still going on and expressed the hope that the United States would put up the money.

Nothing but Money on Him

The same Thai official said Tuan and about 20 of his men in the border town of Maesai and found nothing on him except a great quantity of money.

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they saw no sign that anything had changed, although they

Thieu Asks for Death For Narcotics Dealers

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Aug. 10 (AP) — President Nguyen Van Thieu proposed today a bill that would make dealing in narcotics a wartime crime and would decree the death penalty for importers and peddlers belonging to organized rings.

In sending the bill to the National Assembly for discussion and vote under emergency procedures, Mr. Thieu said that it stressed rehabilitation of addicts, who are considered the victims of dealers in narcotics.

The bill was apparently the result of United States pressure to deal with the narcotics problem. It appeared to be directed not only against the supply to G.I.'s but also against growing use by Vietnamese.

Mr. Thieu said the bill covered intoxicants, narcotics and other dangerous drugs.

He took the occasion, he related, to ask the general to reduce opium production. In response, he said, General Tuan pointed to the mountains on the Burmese side and said there was a great deal of opium there, unfortunately not his own.

The American officials in Bangkok said they were preparing for submission to Washington a long-range program of economic aid to Thailand to help her resettle the Chinese in useful agricultural work as well as to provide aid to opium-growing hill tribes on substitute crops.

For the short term, the officials said, they are confident that more seizures and arrests will be made by Thailand to help reduce the flow of narcotics to American soldiers in Vietnam.

Impartial observers believe that in the comparatively short time that a large American force will remain in Vietnam it is unlikely that the flow of narcotics can be significantly reduced. Once the troops have left, they feel, pressure for long-term programs will be greatly reduced as American leverage in Thailand and Laos erodes.